REMARKS

The Office Action dated November 5, 2004 cited three patents in its rejection of the claims of the instant U.S. Patent Application No. 09/836,512, filed on April 17, 2001 ("Chemtob application"). The patents cited were Kato (U.S. Patent Publication No. 2001/0002831), Colyer et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,151,621) and MacNaughton et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,796,393). Before addressing each of the specific points of the Office Action, Applicant will explain how in general the present invention can be distinguished from the prior art cited (Section I to follow). Then, Applicant will address each of the numbered points made in the Office Action (Section II).

SECTION I. DISTINGUISHING THE PRESENT INVENTION FROM THE PRIOR ART

(A) The Preferred Context of the Present Invention: The usefulness and uniqueness of the present invention can be most clearly demonstrated within the context of a virtual group where a major focus is on the group process itself (and on the interactions/relationships occurring between different member dyads within the group as a whole). This focus is generally maintained in real-life or virtual support groups, training groups, coaching groups and/or therapy groups. Typically in these types of real-life group settings, 5-10 members meet together for an hour or two (with one or two leader/therapists) across several weeks time for the purpose of receiving the benefits or curative factors of ongoing group participation. Some of these curative factors include developing a sense of connectedness, gaining an understanding of the universality of one's problems, taking advantage of the opportunity to express oneself and receive feedback from others, and using the group context to practice relationship/social skills, all in a safe, self-contained and cohesive environment. In addition to the focus on whole group process, participants in these types of groups generally have individual goals that they are working on within the context of the group. Sometimes participants in a therapy group use a workbook to list their goals and monitor their progress on goals while at the same time participating in an ongoing group meeting. Sometimes specialized therapy/training exercises or techniques are utilized to enhance the impact of the group experience. Sometimes group meetings are videotaped and sections replayed to be analyzed carefully by the group as a clinical and/or teaching tool. Sometimes group members complete rating forms on relevant interpersonal variables and progress on personal goals. These forms are used to provide group members with feedback about how they are coming across and what they could do to enhance their relationships in the group. This rating information can also be used to retrieve information regarding the Social Relations Model of interpersonal interaction. This model can be used to understand how the traits (or behavioral proclivities) of the individual along with the special adjustments that individuals make in these behaviors in different relationships can help us understand and improve our interpersonal world. Improvements in interpersonal relationships, in turn, are thought to bring about improvements in the overall functioning and satisfaction with one's life. In addition, information from ratings and other communication variables (such as time spent talking, or the positive versus negative

valence of comments, etc.) can be coded and inputted into statistical programs for analyzing social relations model data and then used to perform research on group dynamics. Sometimes the therapist or leader of this type of group hands out evaluation forms to all group members, reviews the workbooks of all group members, or brings in training videos, guest speakers, or other outside resources into the group room. And finally, many group rooms are equipped with a one-way mirror connected to an observation room, allowing ongoing group meetings to be observed live for training, supervision and research purposes.

In addition to all of the above-described activities, real-life therapy groups facilitate group interaction in special ways. Because the same people usually meet together on a regular basis over time, relationships between each of the dyads within the ongoing group (as well as the overall cohesion of the group as a whole) are strengthened. A major focus is placed on the whole group process, which includes all the activities and interactions occurring simultaneously throughout the group meeting time. For example, in a real-life therapy group someone may be speaking to the group as a whole while using a blackboard, at the same time that other people in the group may be taking notes, another person may be sending a written note to another group member or whispering in another group member's ear, and others may be making brief comments such as, "Oh yes!" or, "That can't be!" while the speaker who has the floor is talking. The main speaker could ask the group, "Does everyone agree with what I am saying here?" and most of the group members may nod "yes" or say "yes", but one person might shake her head "no". The person who doesn't agree could get into a discussion (or argument) with one who agrees, and these two people could exchange communications while the whole group actively listens. In this situation, it is clear to everyone in the group who the main speakers are because of non-verbal cues and leader direction for members outside the main dyad to refrain from talking. At some point someone outside of the dyad may indicate that he/she has a comment or question (either verbally or non-verbally). Finally, group members are encouraged to get in touch with their feelings and reactions to what is going on in the group and to learn to express their reactions in appropriate ways. These reactions include the ***content*** of what people say to each other in the group, but also nonverbal information such as body language, facial expressions, tone of speech and other group ***process*** variables.

(B) How the Virtual Group Interaction System of the Present Invention Captures the Real-Life Group Experience and Can Be Distinguished from the Prior Art: The present invention provides an integrated system of group activity and interaction that allows participants to experience a virtual group of the type described above in a way that approximates the real-life group therapy experience more closely than can be provided by any of the systems of group interaction set forth in the cited patents, including the Kato et al. "Refresh Room" system, existing chat room/instant messaging/group internet surfing systems (i.e. MacNaughton et al.), and/or team conferencing/document sharing systems (i.e. Colyer et al.).

The Combined System of Virtual Group Activity and Interaction

The integrated virtual group activity and interaction system of the present invention is able to capture this real-life group experience by creating a virtual group environment which includes the following components: (1) **the group interaction matrix (or block)** where group members are allowed to communicate freely (using voice, video, text, iconic, and graphic modalities) and all of these communications occurring between different dyads within the group room are graphically represented to each group member on his/her computer screen; (2) **the simultaneous action window or block** (connected to the entire system) which provides a place where group activities can occur (such as listening to guest speakers, watching videos, surfing the internet, reviewing teaching/training/clinical materials, working on a shared project/document) at the same time that all group members are continuing to engage in group interaction and viewing that interaction graphically via the group interaction matrix block described in 1 above; (3) **the personal activity box or block** that is connected to the group interaction matrix and the simultaneous action window to allow each group member to take personal notes, keep a journal of their group experience, and receive private messages from other group members while continuing to participate in the group interaction and to view the graphical representation of the group from the group interaction matrix described in 1 above and while participating in the group activity being simultaneously presented via the simultaneous action window described in 2 above; (4) **the personal documents access block** which allows each group member to store and access personal files (including workbooks, journals, homework assignments, etc.) while they continue to participate in the group interaction; (5) **the resource block** which allows resource materials to be stored and accessed by the group (via the simultaneous action window described above) while the group is in process and while group members continue to participate and view the interaction matrix described above; and (6) **the system-wide capacities of a leader/therapist/boss** to function in the virtual group in much the same way that the leader/therapist functions in a real-life therapy group (such as having the capacity to review the personal or therapist files of each group member, to initiate special ratings/assessment measures for the group to complete, to utilize particular training/therapy tools, to bring in outside resources into the group, to videotape group process and replay selected segments for clinical purposes) all while continuing to participate and view the group process via the other blocks of the system.

By integrating the above described components into one system of virtual group activity and interaction, the present invention provides a system that allows each participant to view and experience, in an intelligible way, everything that is occurring within *the whole virtual group* (including all interactions between different members within the group and all activities occurring within the group) simultaneously in real time from his/her computer screen while participating in the meeting, in much the same way as is possible in a real-life therapy group. No existing system of virtual group interaction combines these components to create this unique and useful system of group interaction that has particular usefulness in the context of providing virtual therapy (or counseling) groups. None of the cited patents has combined these components to provide this type of integrated system of group interaction. In addition to the unique systems and applications that are created by the

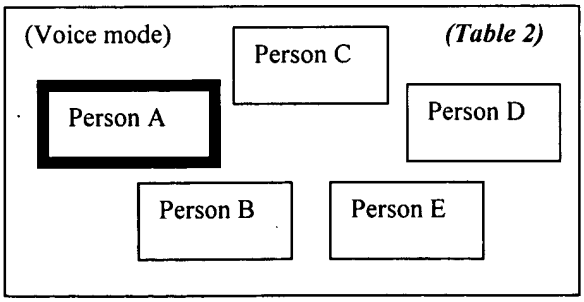
combination of the components described above, a number of these components or features are themselves unique innovations that do not exist anywhere in the field of computer communications networks and are not obvious over the prior art.

SECTION II: DETAILED RESPONSE TO NUMBERED POINTS OF OFFICE ACTION DATED NOVEMBER 5, 2004

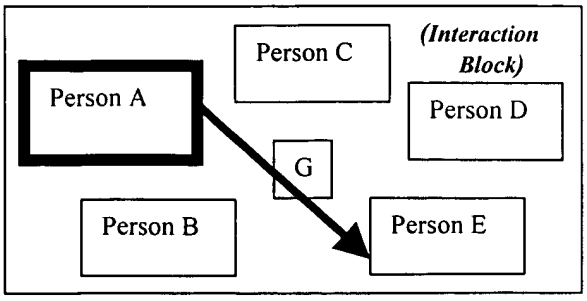
Office Action Point 1 (Addresses Claim 1 of Chemtob application): The examiner points out that Kato's model *teaches a system for communicating content between a group of networked computers using communications modules* (or network interface cards) and allowing users to participate in and view the uses of other users while meeting in a virtual common space (or while sitting alone at their computer). The present invention is also a system for communicating content between networked computers in a virtual common space. However, the virtual group interaction system of the present invention's focus, purpose, design and operation are completely unique and can be clearly distinguished from the Kato model. The present invention's primary focus is the activities and communications occurring within an ongoing virtual group, taking place in a specific virtual meeting room. Kato's model is focussed on *all* of the networked computers within a particular work setting, including those workers interacting in virtual meeting rooms, those taking a "break" with co-workers in the "Refresh Room", those sitting alone at their computers, and those who are away from their computers. The "Refresh Room" is the most comparable component of the Kato model to the type of virtual group meeting room being addressed by the present invention, because the stated purpose of people meeting in the Kato "Refresh Room" is to engage in healthful social interaction with colleagues for "a rest" while they are sitting at their computers. In Kato's "Refresh Room" participants who are sitting down at the same table (or in the same "refresh corner") can communicate using any one of three rest tools: a voice tool, a character tool (text chat) or a multi-user game tool. In the illustration below, one of Kato's Refresh Rooms, with five workers communicating at one table, is compared with Chemtob's group room, where the same five people are meeting together in a virtual group meeting. For the purposes of comparison, let's imagine that the groups in these two models are using voice communication mode only. Let's also imagine that Person A is talking specifically to Person E while the group listens intently in each of the two models.

Comments Illustration 1

One of Kato's Refresh Rooms



Chemtob's Group Room



The two models appear similar in that there is a visual representation of each of the participants in the meeting. When one person is sending a message (be it voice or text), there is a way in both models to know who the **originator** of the communication is. (In this illustration, in both models, a heavy line around his box identifies the speaker. However, this could be indicated in other ways, such as brightening the speaker's box or making it a different color). In the Chemtob model, there is an arrow extending from the originator of the voice communication (Person A) to the intended target or receiver of the voice communication (Person E). However, there is no way to know who the intended ***target*** of the specific communication is in Kato's model. (It is more difficult to see the importance of representing the target of a communication when there are only two participants present in the virtual group meeting because the viewer can reason that the target is obvious — it has to be the person who is not talking or writing text. However, in the therapy group context it is common for five or more members to meet together. If the interaction in Illustration 1 were occurring in a real-life group, Person A would be giving non-verbal indications or cues that he is talking to Person E. However, in a virtual group room, one cannot clearly depict this information in Kato's model, because the Kato model has no way for participants interacting within a group to indicate who their intended target is. In addition, there is no graphical representation of the communication flow indicating that Person A is talking to a specific target (Person E) in the Kato model. In the Chemtob model, all virtual group participants can "see" that Person A is directing his comments to Person E. ***In addition, there is a target destination G allowing participants to indicate that they are directing their communication to the group as a whole rather than a specific participant, if desired.*** This is not possible in the Kato model. The Chemtob model's capacity to indicate the target or intended receiver ***of each communication*** (be it open or hidden voice or text) is a unique and essential feature for depicting virtual group interaction in a way that captures the experience of being in a real-life group. Kato's model is unable to do this because it does not systematically identify the target ***of each communication*** within the ongoing group meeting occurring at one of the tables in a Refresh Room, and it has no way of representing the directional flow of communications between dyads within a group. Kato does have a graphical representation of the networked computers within the system, but Kato's graphical representation is not focused on the interactions between participants within one Refresh Room group meeting, but on all of the different computers that are connected across the whole work setting. Kato's Figures 6 gives a representation of all nine of the workers whose computers are networked together. In Kato's Figure 6, each of the networked workers is indicating some information about his/her current status. Also represented in Kato's Figure 6 is the status of different virtual meeting rooms (including the Refresh Rooms). Kato's Figure 6 indicates that worker Tadokoro (SC221) and worker Inami (SC222) are both sitting at their computers. In Kato Figure 7 these two workers are shown to be talking together at Table 2 of the Refresh Room. While these are graphical representations, neither of these Kato figures captures the processes being represented by Chemtob's graphical representations of within group communication as explained above. While both systems have graphical modules that transmit information to a server, these graphical modules are representing completely different operations.

The Kato and Chemtob models are different in another important way. All messages in the Kato model (as well as in any other existing system of virtual group interaction) must be sent, received and experienced in ***serial order,*** one message at a time. However, in the present invention, different communications between virtual group members can be sent and received simultaneously, as often occurs in real-life group interaction. To illustrate this point let's compare the five people interacting at one table of Kato's Refresh Room to the Chemtob group room with five participants using text communications only.

Comments Illustration 2

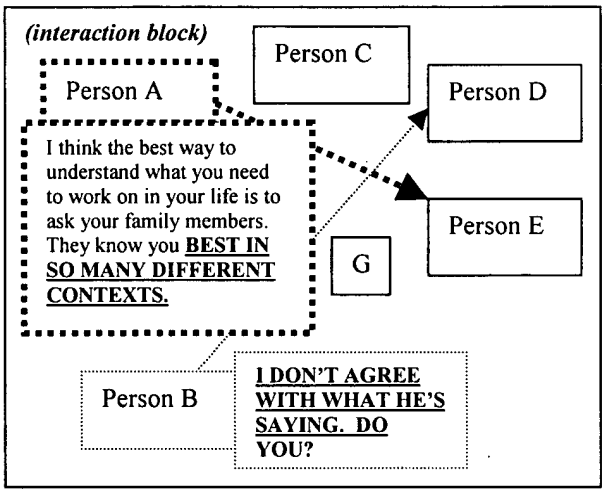
One of Kato's Refresh Rooms Below

(Using Text Tool) *(Table 2)*

Person A: I think the best way to understand what you need to work on in your life is to ask your family members. They know you // (interrupted by following message).

Person B: I don't agree with what he's saying. Do you?

Chemtob's Group Room Below



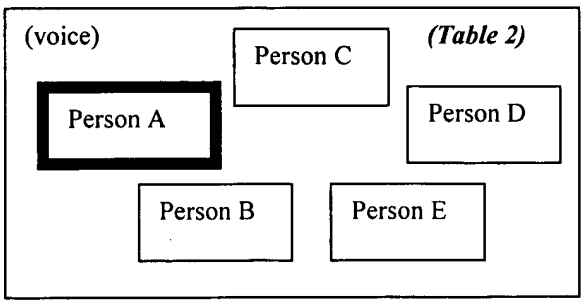
In the above illustration, the overlap of the two text communications occurring simultaneously in the same group in the Chemtob model above is indicated by bold capital underlined words. Specifically, in the Chemtob group room Person A is writing "BEST IN SO MANY DIFFERENT CONTEXTS" with Person E as the intended target ***at the same time*** that Person B is sending a text message to Person D stating "I DON'T AGREE WITH WHAT HE'S SAYING. DO YOU?" The present invention is able to depict overlapping communications in a way that captures real-life group experience. It allows Person B to communicate something to Person D without interrupting the main speaker (Person A). The present invention provides buttons to allow the participants to distinguish between making ***main comments*** versus ***side comments*** and graphically indicates this by varying the type of perimeter around the text message and the type of arrow indicating the directional flow of each type of communication. In illustration 2 above, the main comment (Person A writing to Person E) is distinguished by a more prominent dash perimeter and arrow than the side comment (Person B sending a text message to Person D). Please note that in the Kato model, it is impossible to know whom the intended target of Person A's communication is or who the intended target of Person B's communication is. The present invention provides a system for allowing participants to engage in the simultaneous exchange of multiple communications between members of the same virtual group and for depicting all of these simultaneous interactions occurring within the whole group ***in an intelligible way*** on the viewing

screen of each participant. Therefore, the present system of virtual group interaction is able to approximate the experience of being in a real-life group much more closely than Kato's model (or any other existing system of virtual group interaction) is able to do.

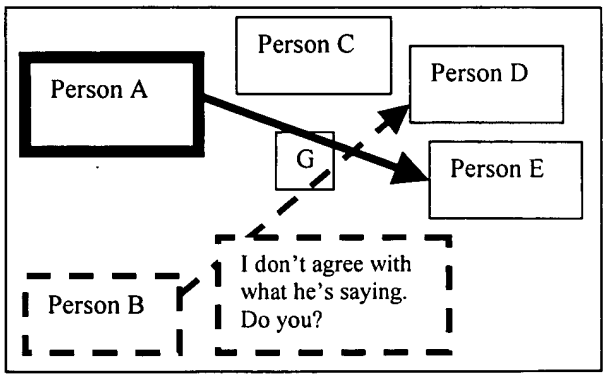
The two models are also dissimilar in another vital way. In Kato's "Refresh Room" participants who are sitting down at the same table in the refresh room can communicate using any ***one*** of three "rest" tools—a voice tool, a character tool (text chat) or a multi-user game tool (Kato paragraphs 40-45). Participants are not able to use all types of communication tools simultaneously in Kato's model (or in any other existing system of virtual group interaction), as is possible with the present invention. In addition, the Kato model is set up so that only one member can send a message to another member at the same table within the same refresh corner at a time. The Kato model allows for only one type of communication to be occurring at a time (voice or text or game). It does not allow for someone to be talking at the same time that another participant is sending an open written message to another group member, for example. The present invention does allow for this as seen in Illustration 3 below. In Illustration 3, Person A is talking specifically to Person E (as indicated by the heavy line around Person A's box indicating voice communication and the arrow from Person A's box to Person E's box indicating the intended target of the voice communication), while Person B is simultaneously sending an open text message (open in that all participants in the virtual group can view the content of his text message) to Person D. In this example, the text message originator is indicated both by the dashed lines around Person B's box, the dashed lines around the actual message (which states, "I don't agree with what he's saying. Do you?"), and by the dashed arrow originating from Person B and terminating with Person D, indicating that Person D is the intended target of the communication. As is seen in Illustration 3, the Kato model is unable to allow the use of the voice communication between Person A and Person E at the same time that another group member (Person B) is using the text tool to send a message to Person D. Nor can the Kato model graphically represent these communications in an intelligible and unique way, as is possible with the present invention. This is a serious limitation of the Kato model (as well as all other existing models of virtual group interaction). Therefore, while both the Kato and Chemtob system have communications modules that transmit information to a server, these communications modules are fundamentally different from each other.

Comments Illustration 3

One of Kato's Refresh Rooms Below



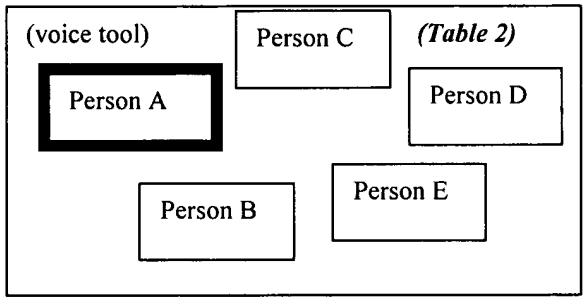
Chemtob's Group Room Below



There is one final difference in virtual group interaction between the Kato model and the present invention to be pointed out here. In the present invention, a group member may send a ***hidden*** message to another group member, in which the content of the message is displayed only for the intended receiver. However, the present invention also is able to represent graphically that one member has sent a hidden message to another member. This feature of the present invention is a way to represent the real-life group experience where group members sometimes send private notes to each other or whisper in each other's ear while the group is proceeding. In a real-life group it may be obvious to everyone in the group (and therapeutically relevant) that certain members are sending private notes to other certain members (or whispering during the ongoing group meeting), even if the leader or the rest of the group never learn what the content of any specific private message is. In the right side of Illustration 4 below, person A is talking to Person E while Person B is simultaneously sending a hidden text message to Person D. The content of the hidden text message appears only in Person D's personal activity box. However, a graphical representation of the hidden communication is made so that the whole group is aware that these two group members are engaging in private communications.

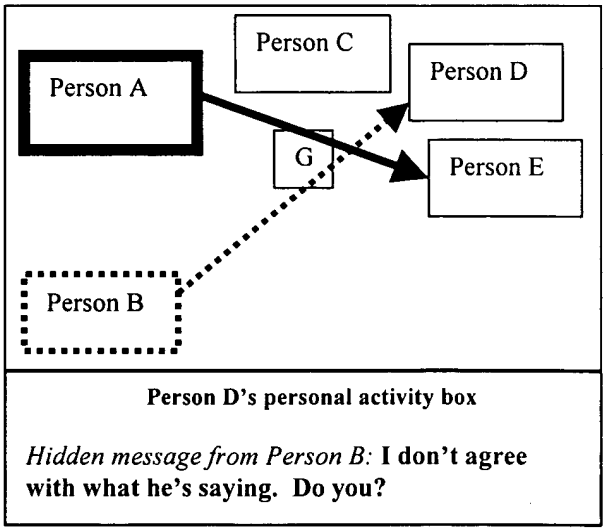
Comments Illustration 4

One of Kato's Refresh Rooms Below



Chemtob's Group Room Below

(Person D's Computer Screen)



It is clear from the above illustration that Kato's model is unable to allow group members to send hidden messages or to depict this private communication graphically for all group members. In the Kato model, Person B would have to interrupt the speaker (Person A) to make this comment out loud (since in this example, the voice tool is being used in the Kato Refresh Room). In the present invention, Person B is able to send a private message to Person D, the content of the message appearing in Person D's personal activity box (which only Person D is able to view); however, it is still clear to all group members that a hidden message has been sent from Person B to Person D because the hidden message is graphically depicted in this illustration by the dotted perimeter and arrow between the two group members.

Claim 1 has been amended and new claims 44-47 have been added to better define the invention over the prior art.

Office Action Point 2 (Addresses Claims 2 & 30 of Chemtob application): Claims 2 (dependent to Claim 1) and 30 (dependent to Claim 29) of the Chemtob application describes ***a communications module*** that transmits content selected from the group comprising voice, video and text to the server (Claim 2) or to an internet web site (Claim 30). The examiner points out that Kato's design allows for video (paragraph 47, Kato) and voice and text (paragraph 41, Kato) as means of communication in a virtual group. However, as pointed out in the preceding discussion, Kato's model allows for only one of three communication tools (voice, text, or game) to be utilized at a time (Kato, paragraphs 40-45), communications can only be sent one at a time in serial order, voice and text communications cannot be intermixed in one continuous virtual group meeting, the originator and intended target of each communication cannot be represented, and there is no way to send hidden messages between group members as described above. While both the Kato model and the present invention have communications modules that feed into a server, and both designs allow for video, voice and text communications, that is where the similarities end. The Chemtob communications module is fundamentally different from the Kato communications module in that it creates the capacity to integrate the different types of communication (open and hidden voice, text, and iconic messages) in real-time so that different types of communication can be utilized simultaneously. Claims 2 and 30 have been amended to better define the invention over the prior art.

Office Action Point 3 (Addresses Claims 3 & 31 of Chemtob application): Claims 3 (dependent to Claim 1) and 31 (dependent to Claim 29) of the Chemtob application describe how voice is communicated within the virtual group interaction system of the present invention through transmission to a server (Claim 3) or to an internet website (Claim 31). In this suggested design, only one person within the virtual group could be ***talking*** at a time (while other group members could send hidden or open text or iconic messages) while the one person was talking. Claims 3 and 31 describe how this is accomplished (through the use of a flag activation off and on switch software routine within the communications module). It is not an essential feature of the present invention that only one person is allowed to talk in the virtual group at a time. Indeed, it is often the case that people in a real-life group setting make brief oral comments while one person technically has "the floor". The Chemtob application does not purport to have invented voice communication over computer networks. In fact, Kato did not purport to have invented voice communications over computer networks either. Kato states (Paragraph 45), "Since the voice meeting tool, the character meeting tool and the multiuser game tool are based on the known technology and the description is merely an example of utilizing explanation, more description will be omitted." However, Kato's voice tool was considered to be an essential component of that overall invention. This is also the case in the present invention. Specifically, voice communication is an essential component (in combination with other components) in the virtual group interaction system of the present invention. With respect to indicating to all virtual group participants who is talking at any one time in the group, both the Kato model and the Chemtob system have a way of indicating this. All existing chat rooms as well as Kato's

Refresh Rooms have a system of displaying to group participants who is talking. While Applicant is not claiming to have invented the system of graphically representing who is talking within a virtual group, this is an important feature of the present invention when combined with other features making up the virtual group interaction system of the present invention. The examiner mentions that Kato's design allows users to view the status of the users (paragraph 45, Kato), but this is not referring to who is talking within one of the groups of people meeting at one table within Kato's refresh rooms. In paragraph 45, Kato refers the reader to Figure 6 which displays all the workers who are networked by computer at the work site and what each of them is doing (e.g. whether they have left the office, gone to a refresh room, or are working at their computer). This is not the same thing as displaying which person is talking at one of the tables of Kato's refresh rooms. Claim 3 has been canceled and its limitations incorporated into claim 5. Claim 31 has been canceled and its limitations incorporated into claim 33.

Office Action Point 4 (Addresses Claims 4 & 32 of Chemtob application): Claims 4 and 32 of the Chemtob application describe how the activation flags for allowing only one person to talk at a time within the virtual group can be automatically reset after a certain time interval. This would enable someone else to break into the conversation and assume "the floor", so that no one virtual group member monopolizes the group time by talking without pause. Claims 4 and 32 of the Chemtob application describe how the information from the voice activation resetting flags is communicated through transmission to a server (Claim 4) or to an internet website (Claim 32). In this suggested design of the Chemtob model, only one person within the virtual group could be talking at a time (while other group members could send hidden or open text or iconic messages) while the one person was talking. Claims 4 and 32 describe how the voice activation flags can be reset allowing different group members to have a chance to take the floor. In a set-up where more than one person can talk at a time in the virtual group meeting, the rules of appropriate social interaction (prohibitions against talking while someone else is talking or interrupting someone who is talking or refusing to yield the floor when there is clear indication that others would like to speak) as well as the guidance of the therapist/leader in directing the group process would have to suffice to maintain a balance in the amount of talking done by different members within the group. As mentioned previously, sometimes several people within a real-life therapy group may end up talking at a time while the group is in session. It is not an essential feature of the present invention that only one person be allowed to talk in the virtual group at a time, as it is often the case that people in a real-life group setting make brief voice comments while one person technically has "the floor". Therefore, the present invention does not insist on having a system that only allows one person to talk at a time. It should be possible to choose in each group setting whether the one person talking at a time rule (and operational set-up) should be in play or whether several persons should be able to talk at a time in a free-flowing manner. The Examiner points out that Kato's design allows for the status of networked worker to be refreshed (paragraph 45, Kato). This refreshing of the image of what different workers are doing is not the same type of refreshment being described in Claims 4 and 32 of the Chemtob application. Kato states in Paragraph 45 that all users can look at the computer screen view as illustrated by Kato Figure 6 which displays all the workers who are networked by computer at the work site and what each

of them is doing (e.g. whether they have left the office, gone to a refresh room, or are working at their computer). This is not the same thing as displaying when the flags for voice activation have been re-set in the virtual group meeting of the present invention. Claim 4 has been canceled and its limitations have been incorporated into claim 5. Claim 32 has been canceled and its limitations have been incorporated into claim 33.

Office Action Point 5 (Addresses Claims 5 & 33 of Chemtob application): Claims 5 and 33 of the Chemtob application describe ***how the timer module connected to the voice activation flags*** of the group interaction system includes an over-ride function for re-starting the predetermined time interval for which any one person is allowed to talk within the virtual group. Claims 5 and 33 of the Chemtob application describe how the information from the timer module connected to the voice activation flag system is communicated through transmission to a server (Claim 5) or to an internet website (Claim 33). This timer module is only relevant in the set-up in which only one person is allowed to talk at a time and the length of time any one person is allowed to talk is controlled by the flag activation system in connection with the timer module. The claims examiner points out that Kato's design provides "a means for a timer with refresh means" (paragraph 45, Kato). However, this timer in Kato's model is not doing the same thing as the timer being described in Claims 5 and 33 of the Chemtob application. Chemtob does not claim to have invented timers per se, but neither did Kato. Kato states in Paragraph 45 that all users can look at the computer screen view as illustrated by Kato (Figure 7) which displays the participants at one table of one refresh room and the entrance time and use time for each participant in that refresh room meeting. This is not the same thing as displaying when the flags for voice activation have been re-set in the virtual group meeting of the present invention. Claims 5 and 33 have been amended to better define the invention over the prior art.

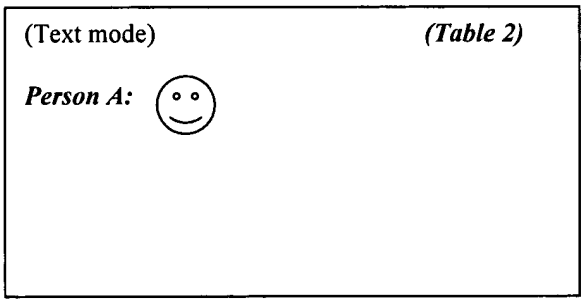
Office Action Point 6 (Addresses Claims 6 & 34 of Chemtob application): Claims 6 and 34 of the Chemtob application describe how a ***still or dynamic video image*** is used to depict each client within the group, and how this information communicated through transmission to a server (Claim 6) or to an internet website (Claim 34). Chemtob does not maintain that the use of a still or dynamic image to represent the participants in the virtual group is unique to this invention. However, the use of still or dynamic video image to depict each client connected by computer was not unique to the Kato design either. It is, however, an essential component of the present invention that each participant in the virtual group be identified in some way or another, including a dynamic or still video image or a text nameplate. Claims 6 and 34 have been amended to better define the invention over the prior art.

Office Action Point 7 (Addresses Claims 7 & 35 of Chemtob application): Claims 7 and 35 of the Chemtob application describe ***a feedback communications module*** that allows group members to choose specific feedback responses to send to another group member and graphically depicts the transmission of a feedback response from an originator to an intended target and how this information is communicated through transmission to a server (Claim 7) or to an internet website (Claim 35). The examiner points out that Kato's design allows each user to be able to send and receive graphic, text

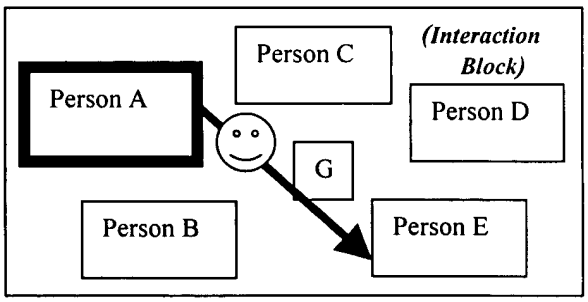
and voice messages and refers to Figure 6 in Kato for support. Kato's Figure 6 shows all nine networked computers (not just those interacting at one table in the refresh room) and depicts the status of each worker using either a video image or a text message. These messages (in the Kato model) are fixed over a period of time and are not interactive in the same way as the feedback responses are used in the Chemtob model. Chemtob is not purporting to have invented a feedback library of iconic symbols, brief text notes and facial expression figures, per se, because they are present in prior art. The present invention allows participants in an ongoing virtual group to select a specific feedback symbol from a library of feedback responses and then to send that feedback symbol (e.g. a "happy face") to the intended target or (display it to communicate something to the whole group), and then to graphically represent the transmission of the feedback symbol from the originator to the intended target via the graphical communications flow module so it is witnessed by all group members. The library of feedback responses is an important component of the overall virtual group interaction system of the present invention. The Kato model does not allow for this type of transmission and graphical representation of iconic messages within an ongoing group, in combination with other types of communication being utilized at the same time. To illustrate this point, please see Illustration 5 below. In each of the virtual groups below, there are five people interacting together. In this illustration, person A is sending out a happy face to Person E. This transaction is very clear in Chemtob's model, but the Kato model cannot allow for Person A to send Person E a happy face and have that transaction be graphically represented.

Comments Illustration 5

One of Kato's Refresh Rooms Below



Chemtob's Group Room Below

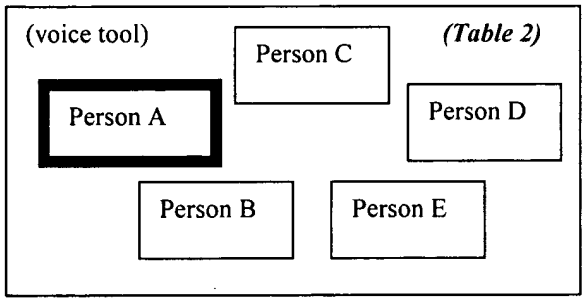


Furthermore, because the Kato model only allows one communication tool to be used at a time within an ongoing group, the model cannot allow one group member to send an iconic message to another member to express how that member is experiencing what the speaker is saying. In Illustration 6 below let's imagine the two virtual groups of five people where the voice tool is being utilized. Let's imagine Person A is talking to Person E, and Person B wants to express her reaction to what Person A is saying by sending a "happy face" to Person A. Let's say at the same time that Person D is not feeling very good about how the group is going in general and so selects a sad face to display in his box to express this information to the group. The Chemtob model allows for this interactive and simultaneous use of iconic feedback responses, while the Kato model is unable to allow the group members to use this method of communication or graphically

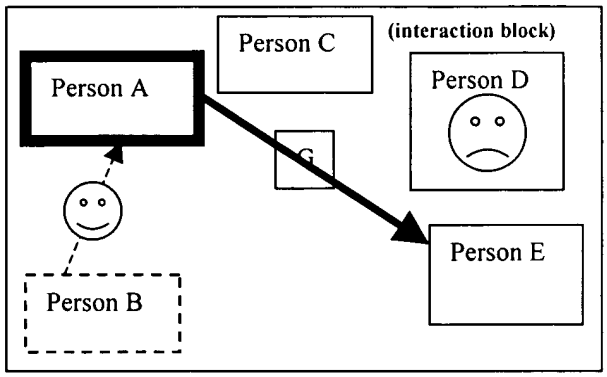
represent such interactions. Therefore, while both the Kato and Chemtob systems have some type of feedback or graphic modules, they are fundamentally different in their operation within those systems. Claim 7 has been canceled, and its limitations have been incorporated into claim 8. Claim 35 has been canceled, and its limitations have been incorporated into claim 36.

Comments Illustration 6

One of Kato's Refresh Rooms Below



Chemtob's Group Room Below



Office Action Point 8 (Addresses Claims 8 & 36 of Chemtob application): Claims 8 and 36 of the Chemtob application describe ***a feedback response editor*** that allows group members to create and store custom feedback responses in the feedback response library and transmit this information to a server (Claim 8) or to an internet website (Claim 36). The examiner points out that Kato illustrates in Figure 6 that users can create their own brief text or iconic messages to indicate their status (e.g. gone on vacation, out to lunch, etc.). The examiner concluded that Kato's model has a design for storing and editing feedback responses. Chemtob is not purporting to have created the ability to custom design and store feedback responses per se. What is unique about the feedback response editor of the present invention is that it allows participants to perform access/review/editing operations while participating in an ongoing virtual group. This is important because a group leader could ask all participants to write one word that describes how they are feeling and then display to the group. It is important to have a way to custom design specific feedback responses while an ongoing group is in process. Participants can edit and transmit their feedback responses without having to leave the ongoing group because the feedback response editor of the present invention is integrated into the overall system of virtual group interaction. The examiner points out that Kato's design allows each user to be able to send and receive graphic, text and voice messages and refers to Figure 6, Kato for support. Kato's Figure 6 shows all nine networked computers (not just those interacting at one table in the refresh room) and depicts the status of each worker using either a video image or a text message. These messages (in the Kato model) are fixed over a period of time and are not interactive in the same way as the feedback responses are used in the Chemtob model. In Kato's model, users are able to edit and post their messages, but they are fixed over time and not interactive within an ongoing group. The examiner also points out that Kato's design allows for text chatting, and therefore it has a means of editing and creating feedback responses. As pointed out

previously, only one communication tool can be used at a time in Kato's model. Kato's model does not distinguish between regular text and the library of feedback responses that includes iconic or graphic images to be transmitted within the ongoing group. The Chemtob model allows for text chat at the same time that it allows for the use of a library of feedback responses including iconic and graphic images. These iconic and graphic images and short verbal messages provide a way for conveying nonverbal cues during the ongoing group. This is particularly true of the icons of different facial expressions depicting different emotional reactions. These icons can be edited and conveyed to the group continuously and simultaneously with all the other action going on in the group, which allows the Chemtob model to approximate the real-life group experience than any other existing system of virtual group interaction. Claims 8 and 36 have been amended to better define the invention over the prior art.

Office Action Point 9 (Addresses Claim 9 of Chemtob application): Claim 9 of the present invention describes an aspect of the ***graphical communication flow module*** that has already been discussed above. Because the Chemtob model allows for different types of communication to be occurring simultaneously within an ongoing virtual group, there must be a way of differentiating voice from main comment from side comment, or from open text to hidden text, etc., in the graphical display. In the illustrations above, voice communications were identified by bold perimeters and bold arrows from originator to intended target, and other types of communication were distinguished by dashed lines, and so on. Brightening the perimeter or changing colors of perimeters and arrows are additional ways to distinguish different types of communication in the graphical representation of the interactions. The examiner points out that Kato's design allows for chatting which conform to IRC standards, and that IRC standards provide means for varying visual traits of the ***graphic identifying each participant of the chat.*** While the graphical communication flow module of the present invention does vary the visual graphic to identify each participant in the virtual group room, it also varies the visual characteristics ***of each type of communication*** and the flow of each communication from originator to intended target. The present invention provides a unique form of virtual group interaction that could be utilized in chat rooms, but is substantially different from existing chat room systems. New IRC guidelines and standards will likely have to be formulated to regulate the use of the present invention's system of virtual group interaction over the Internet. However, a website using only the virtual group interaction system of the present invention would be totally unique. Users would have to purchase a software package to load onto their computers in order to be able to access the special website. This is much the way sophisticated game sites are operated. Users purchase the game program, load it onto their computers, and then access the website which hosts the programming to connect these game users over the Internet. Claim 9 has been amended to better define the invention over the prior art.

Office Action Point 10 (Addresses Claim 10 of Chemtob application): Claim 10 of the Chemtob application describes ***a virtual meeting room module of the server*** that provides open membership and restricted membership, and a method facilitating client computers accessing a given virtual meeting room. The examiner points out that Kato's design provides for open and restricted membership meeting rooms and a system of

facilitating client computers accessing virtual meeting rooms. The examiner also points out that Kato's model follows IRC standards for private or open chats. Chemtob does not purport to have invented open and private chat rooms, as they clearly exist in the prior art. However, an associated feature of the present invention is that the group interaction and activity system can be used in both open and restricted virtual meeting rooms. This feature is part of the prior art and would conform to IRC standards. The virtual meeting room of the present invention is unique in that it creates a special type of virtual group meeting space that does not exist anywhere else. This virtual space provides means for viewing all the members of the group as they are participating in the meeting (via the group interaction matrix***) as if they were all sitting around a big conference table***, at the same time that it provides a means (via the simultaneous action window) to surf the internet ***as if they were sitting in front of a large computer monitor, or in front of a chalkboard, or in front of a video projection screen,*** at the same time that it provides documents to be reviewed at the meeting ***as if they were turning the pages of a productivity report***, at the same time that some members are taking notes ***as if they were all supplied with notepads and writing utensils,*** at the same time that people from outside the meeting can communicate with people inside the group room ***as if they were knocking on the virtual meeting room door and asking to join the group or giving someone an important message on a piece of pink paper.*** What is unique here is a virtual group room with the "physical" capabilities of a meeting room in the "real-world". This specific type of meeting room does not exist in the prior art. Kato claims a "method wherein another virtual space used for taking a cooperative rest" (Kato, claim 17). The Kato model describes a Refresh Room where workers take a rest interacting with coworkers that is designed for this specific purpose. Workers are able to sit around a table and talk, and the specific virtual space has everything one would need for this purpose (e.g. a table with chairs to sit around where there are plants, etc). The Chemtob model has a virtual meeting room that has everything required for the purpose of having a meeting that approximates a real-life virtual meeting room as possible. Claim 10 has been canceled and its limitations incorporated into claim 11.

Office Action Point 11 (Addresses Claims 14 and 40 of Chemtob application): Claims 14 and 40 of the Chemtob application describe ***a scheduler*** containing a directory of discussions occurring in different meeting rooms and a scheduler for managing registration for said discussions, with such information being transmitted to a server (Claim 14) or to a website (Claim 40). Clearly, scheduling systems exist in the public domain, and scheduling information was also contained in Kato's model (Figures 6 and 7, Kato). Chemtob does not purport to have invented schedulers per se. However, the present invention can be utilized in conjunction with scheduling systems. Claims 14 and 40 have been amended to better define the invention over the prior art.

Office Action Point 12 (Addresses Claim 15 of Chemtob application): Claim 15 of the Chemtob application describes ***a virtual office system***, having a server which connects computers in virtual meeting rooms, having a scheduler, a communications interface, a graphical communication flow module, an access control module, and a virtual floor plan. Several of these components have already been clearly differentiated from the Kato model. This claim describes a system whereby a manager can look at a

floor plan of all of the available virtual group rooms (such virtual group room as described in comments to Office Action Point 10 above) and "see" who is meeting in each virtual group room, and can enter each group room by clicking on the "enter" button (Chemtob, Figure 17A). A manager can also view a matrix of all of the workers at their computers and find out whether they are sitting at their desks, working from home, and/or participating in an ongoing group in a specific virtual room (Chemtob, Figure 18). While Kato does have a way of showing all of the connected computers within a system and shows which meeting rooms are occupied or not (Figure 6, Kato), there is no way to view a floor plan of all meeting rooms and "see" which workers are meeting in which rooms (as if one was looking into the room through the window in the door of the room) as is possible in the Chemtob virtual office system. Therefore, the Kato and Chemtob virtual office systems can be clearly differentiated. The Kato and Chemtob virtual office systems can be clearly differentiated in other ways as well. The Chemtob system allows workers to engage in real-life activities and interactions that are not possible in the Kato system; the Chemtob system allows virtual group members to communicate with others who are outside the virtual meeting room (e.g. to get important messages) while continuing to participate in the ongoing group; the Chemtob system provides a method for allowing previously restricted outsiders to enter an ongoing virtual group; and the Chemtob system allows group members a way to review email and telephone messages while still participating in the ongoing virtual group. The Kato model cannot accomplish any of these things. Claim 15 has been amended and claim 48 has been added to better define the invention over the prior art.

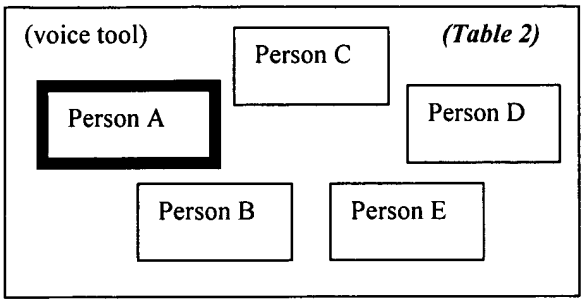
Office Action Point 13 (Addresses Claim 17 of Chemtob application): Claim 17 of the Chemtob application ***describes a virtual office system having an access control module*** that restricts access to selected virtual offices and allows for requesting access to a virtual office (See Chemtob, Figure 17B). The examiner points out that Kato's design provides for open and restricted membership in meeting rooms and a system of facilitating client computers accessing virtual meeting rooms. The examiner also points out that Kato's model follows IRC standards for private or open chats in virtual meeting rooms. Chemtob does not purport to have invented open and private chat rooms per se, but the virtual office access control system of the present invention does more than allow for open and restricted virtual meeting rooms. First of all, workers can enter a specific virtual meeting room by clicking on the "enter" button and inputting a password. If the person wanting to enter the room does not have a password, that person can "knock" on the virtual meeting room "door" and communicate with the leader or the operator of the communications center (See Chemtob, Figure19). If the leader chooses to allow the guest at the "door" to enter into a restricted group room, then the group leader clicks on the visitor's name, then selects "transfer" from the menu in the communications center, and finally clicks on the "seat" in the interaction matrix where the leader wants that visitor to go. The visitor has then entered into the group room interaction matrix and is able to communicate and share documents as if they were all in the same room together (See Chemtob, page 47, lines 1-8 of the patent application.) The control access feature in combination with the communications center and the virtual meeting room provide a unique system for allowing the leader of the group to communicate with a visitor at the door while remaining in the virtual group meeting room with the other members, and

ultimately determining whether to allow the visitor access or not. This type of interaction between people within the group setting and those outside is not possible in the Kato model or any other virtual office system. Claim 17 has been amended to better define the invention over the prior art.

Office Action Point 14 (Addresses Claim 18 of Chemtob application): Claim 18 of the Chemtob application describes ***a method for conducting on-line training*** through the combined use of all of the components of the virtual group interaction and activity system of the present invention. This integrated system invention allows participants to engage in virtual group interaction and observe this interaction (via the group interaction matrix block) ***while they are at the same time*** viewing on-line training materials (via the simultaneous action box). The examiner states that Kato teaches a method for conducting on-line training by providing a virtual meeting room which graphically depicts a representation of the meeting room and the communication flow between originator and target client computers, along with a simultaneous access window for displaying presentation materials which can be used to facilitate a structured discussion. However, this is clearly not the case. In Kato's model (Figure 4), the virtual office display unit 44 is located on a different place from the monitor screen of the worker's computer 76 (Kato, paragraph 35). In Kato's description of the model, the office view (Kato, Figure 6) is displayed on the virtual office display unit 44 in a different location than the personal computer monitor screen. This office view displays the status of all workers networked together — not just those who are interacting at one table of the Refresh Room (Kato, Figure 6). Kato notes, "Generally, in a case where the user is working, the office view as shown in Fig. 6 is displayed on the virtual display unit 44" (Kato, paragraph 38). Later Kato (paragraph 52) describes an embodiment in which the virtual Refresh Room of Kato Figure 7 is automatically displayed on the virtual office display unit 44 when the worker gazes for a set period of time at the virtual office display unit 44. When a worker notices that other workers are located in one of the corners (or at a specific table) of the Refresh Room, he/she can choose to communicate with those workers using one of three kinds of tools—a voice tool, a character (text) tool, or a multiuser game tool (Kato, paragraph 41). The ensuing interaction in the Refresh Room is displayed on the **personal computer monitor screen 76** of each worker involved in the interaction (Kato, paragraph 44). At no time is the user able to view the ongoing interaction between workers meeting at a table in the Refresh Room at the same time that they are viewing presentation materials. In the Kato model, the users interacting together have only one display before them allowing them to use one tool at a time. They cannot view the Refresh Room table display screen at the same time that they are using the multiuser game meeting tool. The Chemtob model allows for participants in a virtual on-line training group to be able to view the ongoing interactions of the group while at the same time viewing the presentation materials. This allows the Chemtob model to provide on-line training in a fundamentally different and effective way. In real-life training groups, it is very important for members within the group to be able to interact with each other and practice various skills together while they are at the same time accessing a training manual or other instructional information. In Illustration 7 below, a comparison is being made between the Chemtob and Kato models in an effort to demonstrate the differences.

Comments Illustration 7

One of Kato's Refresh Rooms Below

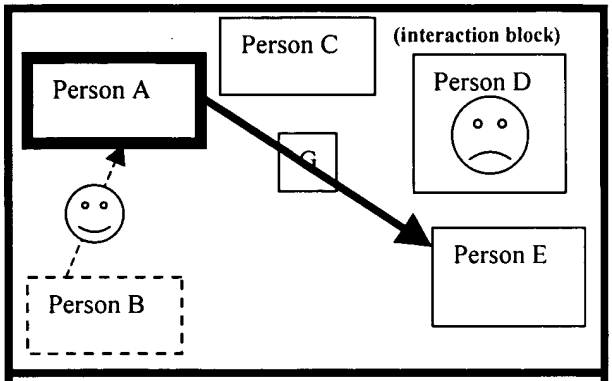


OR

Training manual describing a list of role plays to practice new skills

1. Role play that you are trying to assist an angry customer
2. Role play that you are trying to work out a disagreement with a co-worker

Chemtob's Group Room Below



Simultaneous Action Window

Training manual describing a list of role plays to practice new skills

1. Role play that you are trying to assist an angry customer
2. Role play that you are trying to work out a disagreement with a co-worker

Illustration 7 shows that the Chemtob model allows participants to view the training manual in the Simultaneous Action Window while at the same time they are viewing the group interaction matrix showing all of their communications and reactions to the role plays. None of this is possible in the Kato model, as the participants must view either the training manual or the Refresh Room view (which does not approximate the Chemtob group interaction matrix in terms of being able to represent the total nature of the activities and communications occurring within the ongoing training group). Claim 18 has been amended and claim 49 added to better define the invention over the prior art.

Office Action Point 15 (Addresses Claim 19 of Chemtob application): Claim 19 of the Chemtob application ***describes a method for providing a presentation materials editor and a memory*** on the server for editing and storing presentation materials for on-line training seminars. The examiner points out that Kato's design allows multiuser gaming (paragraph 44, Kato), and that this provides for unique information being edited and stored. While Kato's model does show how unique data can be stored and used during a multiuser game, it does not allow for the presentation materials editor to be accessed by the leader (or other group member) while that leader/member continues to engage in the ongoing group meeting through the virtual group interaction matrix of the Chemtob design and review/select desired materials for presentation to the group via the simultaneous action window of the Chemtob design. In the Kato model, the presentation materials editor is not an accessible and interactive component of the group meeting room as it is in the Chemtob model. In the Chemtob model, presentation materials can be presented to the group via the simultaneous action window and the ongoing group can view and discuss these materials simultaneously. The leader/member can select one of

any number of files stored on the presentation materials editor while participating and viewing the group interaction continuously and simultaneously. The leader can even be editing the materials that are loaded onto the presentation materials editor while he/she is participating in an ongoing group via the virtual group interaction matrix. For these reasons, the presentation materials editor and memory of the Chemtob model is fundamentally different from what is capable in the Kato model. Claim 19 has been amended to better define the invention over the prior art.

Office Action Point 16 (Addresses Claim 20 of Chemtob application): Claim 20 of the Chemtob application describes ***a method for providing a library of feedback responses*** that can be sent from originator to target client. The examiner points out that Kato's design allows each user to be able to send and receive graphic, text and voice messages and refers to Figure 6 in Kato for support. Kato's Figure 6 shows all nine networked computers (not just those interacting at one table in the refresh room) and depicts the status of each worker using either a video image or a text message. The method for providing these feedback responses are fixed over a period of time in the Kato model and are not interactive in the same way as the feedback responses are used in the Chemtob model. Chemtob is not purporting to have invented a feedback library of iconic symbols, brief text notes and facial expression figures, per se. The present invention includes a method for providing participants in an ongoing virtual group with a library of feedback responses allowing participants access to that library of feedback responses so they can select a specific feedback symbol from a library of feedback responses and then to send that feedback symbol (e.g. a "happy face") to the intended target (or display it to communicate something to the whole group), and then graphically represent the transmission of the feedback symbol from the originator to the intended target client via the graphical communications flow module, so that it is witnessed by all group members. The library of feedback responses is an important component of the overall virtual group interaction system of the present invention. The Kato model does not allow for this type of transmission and graphical representation of iconic messages mixed in with all the other types of communication within an ongoing group. To illustrate this point, please see Comments Illustration 5 above. In each of the virtual groups presented in the illustration, there are five people interacting together. In the illustration, Person A is sending out a happy face to Person E. This transaction is very clear in Chemtob's model, but the Kato model cannot allow for Person A to send Person E a happy face and have that transaction be graphically represented to the whole group. Claim 20 has been canceled and its limitations incorporated into claim 21.

Office Action Point 17 (Addresses Claim 21 of Chemtob application): Claim 21 of the Chemtob application describes ***a method of providing a feedback response editor*** for creating custom feedback responses. The examiner points out that Kato teaches a method (illustrated in Figure 6 of Kato) for a user to leave a message informing the other users of a vacation. The examiner points out that Kato illustrates in Figure 6 that users can create their own brief text or iconic messages to indicate their status (e.g. gone on vacation, out to lunch, etc.). The examiner concluded that Kato's model has a design for storing and editing feedback responses. Chemtob is not purporting to have created the ability to custom design and store feedback responses per se. What is unique about the method for providing a feedback response editor of the present invention is that it allows participants

access/review/editing operations while participating in an ongoing virtual group. This is important because a group leader could ask all participants to write one word that describes how they are feeling and then display it to the group. Therefore, it is important to have a way to custom design specific feedback responses while an ongoing group is in process. Participants can edit and transmit their feedback responses without having to leave the ongoing group because the feedback response editor of the present invention is integrated into the overall system of virtual group interaction. The examiner points out that Kato's design allows each user to be able to send and receive graphic, text and voice messages and refers to Figure 6, Kato for support. Kato's Figure 6 shows all nine networked computers (not just those interacting at one table in the refresh room) and depicts the status of each worker using either a video image or a text message. These messages (in the Kato model) are fixed over a period of time and are not interactive in the same way as the feedback responses are used in the Chemtob model. In Kato's model, users are able to edit and post their messages, but they are fixed over time and not interactive within an ongoing group. The examiner also points out that Kato's design allows for text chatting, and therefore it has a means of editing and creating feedback responses. As pointed out previously, only one communication tool can be used at a time in Kato's model. Kato's model does not distinguish between regular text and the library of feedback responses that includes iconic or graphic images to be transmitted within the ongoing group. Claim 21 has been amended to better define the invention over the prior art.

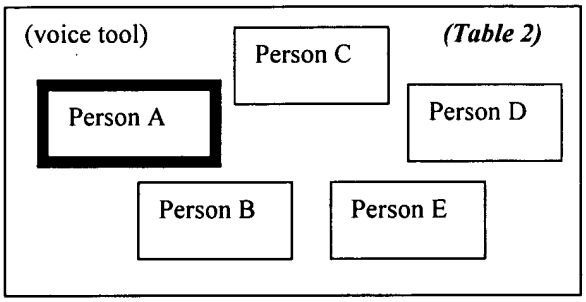
Office Action Point 18 (Addresses Claim 22 of Chemtob application): Claim 22 of the Chemtob application describes ***a method for providing a Resource Directory*** containing literature reviews related to an on-line training topic. The examiner points out that the Kato design provides options to select from different rooms such as meeting rooms and that this is the same thing as the resource directory. However, the Resource Directory being claimed here is a file of resources available to group participants (such as literature reviews and videos) on the training topic. Claim 22 has been amended to better define the invention over the prior art.

Office Action Point 19 (Addresses Claim 23 of Chemtob application): Claim 23 of the Chemtob application describes ***a method for providing an on-line workbook containing a series of individual and group training exercises.*** The examiner states that Kato's design allows for multiuser gaming (paragraph 44 in Kato), and therefore a means exists for group training exercises within Kato's design. However, the Chemtob model can be clearly distinguished from Kato in several important ways. In Comments Illustration 8 below, the Kato and Chemtob models are compared with respect to having an on-line workbook. In the Chemtob model, participants can continue to participate in the ongoing group interaction (via the group interaction matrix) while they are also completing some individual workbook questions (via the simultaneous access window or via the personal activity box). In the Kato model, only one meeting tool can be used at a time, so participants would have to decide whether they wanted to view the on-line workbook or engage in the voice or text interaction tool. In the Chemtob model, participants can complete on-line exercises in their workbooks while continuing to participate in the ongoing group discussion. In addition, a participant may have his/her

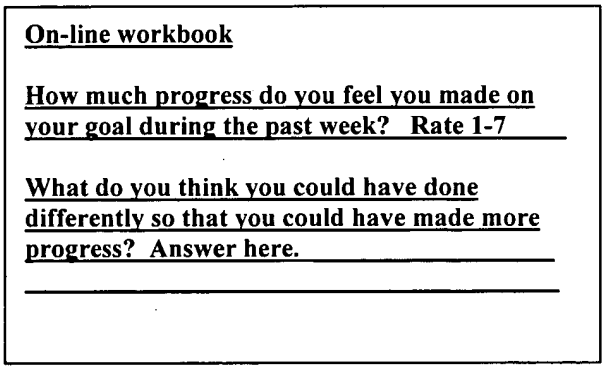
workbook reviewed by the group leader while continuing to participate in the group interaction as well. Finally, the Chemtob model allows for the leader or therapist to choose the appropriate exercises and the timing of their presentation and explain how they should be completed, exactly as would happen in a real-life group meeting. Claim 23 has been amended to better define the invention over the prior art.

Comments Illustration 8

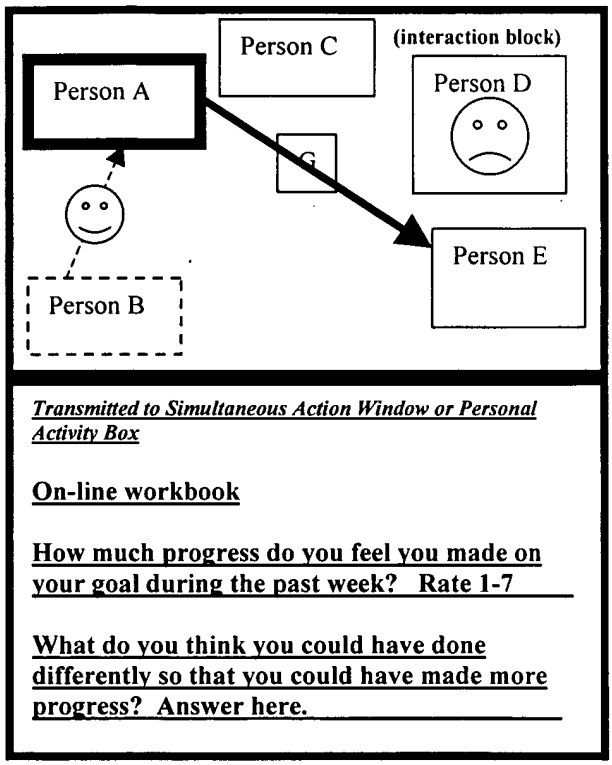
One of Kato's Refresh Rooms Below



OR



Chemtob's Group Room Below



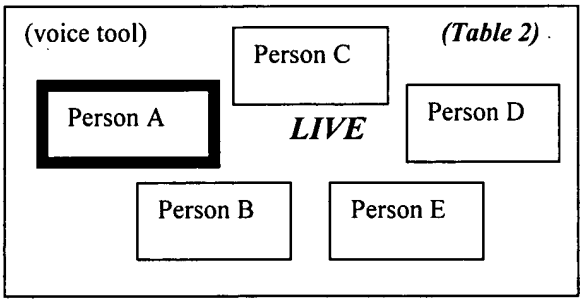
Office Action Point 20 (Addresses Claim 24 of Chemtob application): Claim 24 of the Chemtob application describes ***a method for providing a list of on-line prompt statements that are delivered by group leader or member using the communications system.*** The group leader can select or create the desired prompt and present the prompt to the group for a response while continuing to participate in the ongoing virtual group via the group interaction matrix. This method is interactive and approximates what happens in real-life groups. Specifically, the leader asks questions and makes interpretive comments to facilitate group interaction and healthful movement. This method for making online prompts is also discussed with respect to the ratings graphical module (Office Action Point 29, Chemtob patent application claim 25). It is difficult to distinguish these prompts from other text messages within the Chemtob model. But they can be distinguished from the Kato model in that they are presented interactively via the

simultaneous access window to the group while the group is in process. Claim 24 has been amended to better define the invention over the prior art.

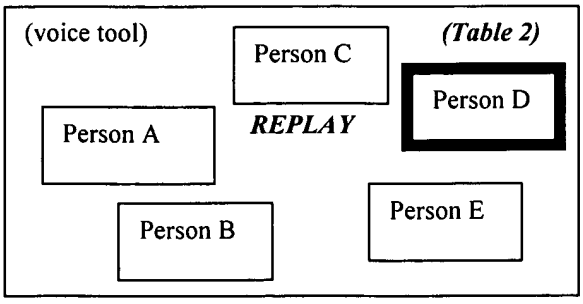
Office Action Point 21 (Addresses Claim 28 of Chemtob application): Claim 28 of the Chemtob application describes ***a method for recording messages and communications flows and selectively replaying these recordings.*** The examiner states that Kato's model allows for voice chatting and graphical representations of communication flows; and, since these means are present, the model must also provide a means for recording voices. While Kato's model may have a method for recording what goes on in the Refresh Room, there are many differences between the Kato and Chemtob models. Specifically, it is only the Chemtob model that allows the group leader/therapist to select segments of what has transpired during a group meeting and replay the selected segment to the group members as they continue to interact in the group interaction matrix being able to comment and discuss what they are viewing. Comments Illustration 9 below demonstrates how this is not possible in the Kato model because they can only look at one activity at a time—the group meeting using one meeting tool at a time (text or voice) or the gaming application where one could presumably replay the selected segment. This is a very important feature in group therapy contexts as videotaping is a widely used technique for providing individuals and groups with audiovisual feedback of their facial expressions, body language, and other information that is hard to capture while one is actively participating in the group process. Claim 28 has been amended to better define the invention over the prior art.

Comments Illustration 9

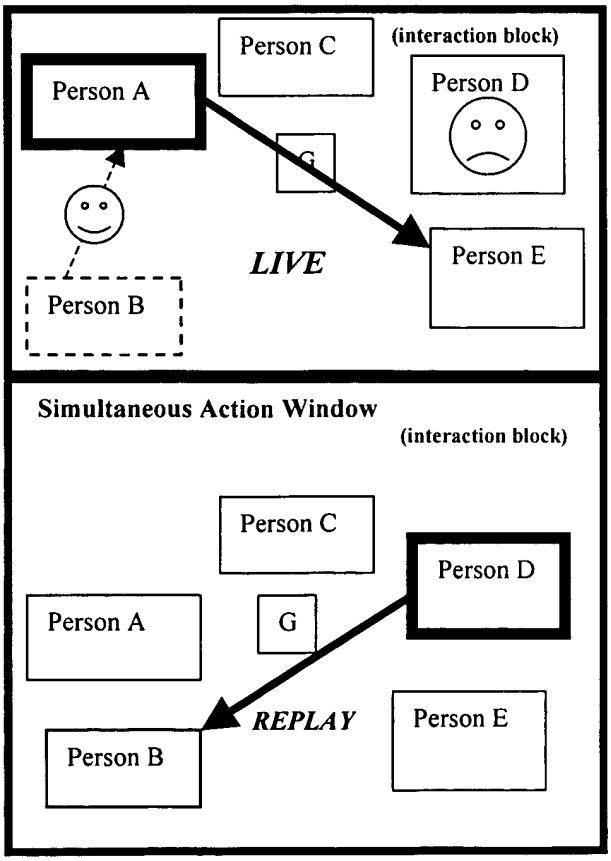
One of Kato's Refresh Rooms Below



OR



Chemtob's Group Room Below



Office Action Point 22 (Addresses Claim 29 of Chemtob application): Claim 29 of the Chemtob application describes ***an internet web site*** on a host providing a structured communications environment utilizing the communications interface, the graphical interface, the virtual room interface, and the feedback interface, along with the presentation materials editor, e-mail, document sharing, and chalkboard modules, which can be viewed via the simultaneous action window while group members continue to participate in the ongoing group. The examiner states that Kato's design makes use of network interface cards; and in addition, he points out that the Kato design allows users to view other users and chat using text and voice. However, each of the components of the website described in Claim 29 has been demonstrated throughout these comments to be fundamentally different from any interfaces and modules delineated by Kato. Claim 29 has been amended and claims 50, 51 and 52 added to better define the invention over the prior art.

Office Action Point 23 (Addresses Claim 41 of Chemtob application): Claim 41 of the Chemtob application describes ***a memory medium storing software for a communications system.*** The examiner states that, "the Kato model has the claimed communications interface and graphical interface allowing the conversation between participants." However, it has been demonstrated throughout these comments that the Kato model and the Chemtob system are fundamentally different. To summarize, the memory medium storing software for the communications system of the present invention can be distinguished from the Kato model in the following ways:

- It provides a system for the simultaneous exchange of multiple audiovisual, text and iconic messages between different dyads (or sets of participants) in real time within the same virtual group, as is possible within a real-life therapy group setting.
- It provides a system to clearly distinguish the type of each communication (e.g. open and hidden audio, text, or iconic/feedback messages), the content of each communication, and the directional flow of each communication (from sender(s) to receiver(s) within the same group), which mimics the real-life therapy group's ability to distinguish these different types of communications.
- It provides a system for identifying the sender and receiver ***of each communication or message*** (be it audio, text, or iconic) occurring within the group in real time in much the same way that the sender and receiver of each message is conveyed in a real-life therapy group setting. It provides a system that allows the group members to identify the group as a whole as the intended target of a communication (the "G" button) as is possible within the context of a real-life therapy group.
- It provides a system that allows group members to differentiate whether they are sending a main comment (part of the main conversation going on in the group) or a side comment (a brief comment showing one's approval or registering an objection), as is possible within the context of a real-life therapy group.
- It provides a system that allows group members to send both open messages (ones that are meant for all other group members to receive) and hidden

messages (ones that are only meant for a specific receiver(s) and not for the whole group) in much the same way that the real-life therapy group allows participants to share information openly or give each other written "private" notes or whisper into another participant's ear.

- It provides a system that allows virtual group members to instantaneously and continuously give feedback about how they are experiencing the group and/or how they feel the speaker is coming across through multiple means (voice, text and iconic/graphic), as is possible in real-life therapy groups.
- It has been shown in these comments that Kato's method is unable to accomplish any of the above.

Claim 41 has been amended to better define the invention over the prior art.

Office Action Point 24 (Addresses Claim 42 of Chemtob application): Claim 42 of the Chemtob application describes ***a method for providing on-line counseling (group therapy).*** This is the preferred context in which it is easiest to demonstrate the usefulness and uniqueness of the whole system working together as a unique method for providing on-line counseling or group therapy. The combination of the following features provides an integrated and unique method for providing on-line counseling (or group therapy).

i. The virtual group interaction matrix of the present invention

- The present invention provides a method for the simultaneous exchange of multiple audiovisual, text and iconic messages between different dyads (or sets of participants) in real time within the same virtual group, as is possible within a real-life therapy group setting.
- It provides a method to clearly distinguish the type of each communication (e.g. open and hidden audio, text, or iconic messages), the content of each communication, and the directional flow of each communication (from sender(s) to receiver(s) within the same group), which mimics the real-life therapy group's ability to distinguish these different types of communications.
- It provides a method for identifying the sender and receiver ***of each communication or message*** (be it audio, text, or iconic) occurring within the group in real time in much the same way that the sender and receiver of each message is conveyed in a real-life therapy group setting.
- It provides a method that allows the group members to identify the group as a whole as the intended target of a communication (the "G" button) as is possible within the context of a real-life therapy group.
- It provides a method that allows group members to differentiate whether they are sending a main comment (part of the main conversation going on in the group) or a side comment (a brief comment showing one's approval or registering an objection), as is possible within the context of a real-life therapy group.
- It provides a method that allows group members to send both open messages (ones that are meant for all other group members to receive) and hidden messages (ones that are only meant for a specific receiver(s) and not for the whole group) in much the same way that the real-life therapy group allows

participants to share information openly or give each other written "private" notes or whisper into another participant's ear.

- It provides a method that allows virtual group members to instantaneously and continuously give feedback about how they are experiencing the group and/or how they feel the speaker is coming across through multiple means (voice, text and iconic/graphic), as is possible in real-life therapy groups.
- It provides a method that allows group members to provide ratings in response to a question raised by the group leader and for those ratings to be displayed in the interaction matrix all at the same time so that they can be viewed and discussed by the group members.
- It provides a method that allows the use of a specialized group therapy technique (continuous feedback & signaling technique) in which a listener continuously displays either a positive (+) or negative (-) feedback response as he/she listens to a speaker, changing the response to match his/her reaction to what the speaker is saying and signaling to the speaker a change in how he/she is coming across, as is possible in real-life therapy groups.
- It has been shown in these comments that Kato's method is unable to accomplish any of the above.

ii. The capacity for each participant to bring a personal file into the virtual group therapy room

- The present invention provides a method for allowing each participant to bring his/her workbooks, evaluation forms, and homework assignments and allowing these items to be accessed at any time ***while the group member continues to participate in the virtual therapy group meeting,*** and these personal files can be shared with the whole group or with the leader while the group is in process if desired, as is possible in real-life therapy groups. Kato's method is unable to accomplish this.

iii. The capacity to bring outside resources into the virtual group room

- The present invention provides a method in which training videos, internet web site information, printed materials, live seminar presentations, etc. can be presented within the ongoing virtual group (via the simultaneous activity window) while the ongoing group interaction continues uninterrupted in much the same way that outside resources are integrated into the group process in a real-life therapy group context. Kato's method is unable to accomplish this.

iv. The capacity to videotape & replay sequences during the virtual group meeting as a therapy tool

- The present invention provides a method which allows for the graphical representation of the group session to be videotaped and then sections of the videotape to be played in the simultaneous activity window to the group during an ongoing virtual group therapy session, in much the same way that this technique is used in real-life therapy settings. Kato's method is unable to accomplish this.

v. Specialized leader/therapist capacities that are present in real-life therapy groups

- The present invention provides a method in which a leader/therapist has the capacity to review the personal files of each group member (e.g. each participant's personal workbook) while the virtual group is in process, much as is possible for leaders in real-life group therapy sessions.
- It provides a method in which a leader/therapist has the capacity to initiate special ratings, assessments, and statistical analyses while the virtual group is in process, as is possible in real-life group therapy.
- It provides a method in which the leader/therapist has the capacity to direct the virtual group to utilize a particular training/therapy exercises or tool within the group, as is the case in real-life therapy groups.
- It provides a method in which the leader/therapist has the capacity to bring in outside resources as outlined above and present them to the group via the simultaneous action window while the group continues to interact, as is possible in real-life therapy groups.
- It provides a system in which the leader/therapist can keep his/her own file on each group member and access these files at any time, even while the group is in process, as is customary in real-life therapy groups.
- It provides a system in which the leader/therapist can choose specific sequences of recorded group interaction to replay during the ongoing group meeting for therapeutic or didactic purposes, as is possible within real-life therapy groups.
- It provides a method for the leader to collect and retrieve communications process data (such as length of time engaging in certain types of communication, the number of negative and positive comments exchanged between different dyads within the group, etc.) as well as various types of assessments on group members, and for this information to be statistically analyzed so as to provide valuable information to the group leader, in much the same way as assessment information can be retrieved in a real-life therapy group.
- It has been shown in these comments that Kato's method is unable to accomplish any of the above.

vi. The capacity for having live ongoing groups observed

- The present invention provides a method that allows for an ongoing virtual group to be observed for purposes of training and research, in a way protecting the privacy/security of the participants, in much the same way that real-life therapy groups are sometimes observed for training and research purposes.
- Kato's method is unable to accomplish any of the above.

Claim 42 has been amended to better define the invention over the prior art.

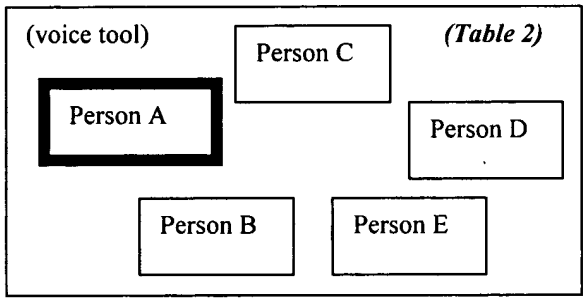
Office Action Point 25 (Addresses Claim 43 of Chemtob application): Claim 43 of the Chemtob application *describes* ***a method for providing a library of feedback responses wherein a member may provide feedback by sending a feedback response.*** The method allows group members to choose specific feedback responses to send to another group member and graphically depicts the transmission of a feedback response from an originator to an intended target. The examiner points out that Kato's design features a GUI for each user where they are able to receive information regarding the other users. In office action point 8 (Addressing Claims 7 and 35 of the Chemtob application), the examiner points out that Kato's design allows each user to be able to send and receive graphic (from the library of feedback responses), text and voice messages and refers to Figure 6, Kato for support. Kato's Figure 6 shows all nine networked computers (not just those interacting at one table in the refresh room) and depicts the status of each worker using either a video image or a text message. These messages (in the Kato model) are fixed over a period of time and are not interactive in the same way as the feedback responses are used in the Chemtob model. Chemtob is not purporting to have invented a feedback library of iconic symbols, brief text notes and facial expression figures, per se, because they are present in prior art. But the present invention provides a method which allows for participants in an ongoing virtual group to select a specific feedback symbol from a library of feedback responses and then to send that feedback symbol (e.g. a "happy face") to the intended target or (display it to communicate something to the whole group), and then to graphically represent the transmission of the feedback symbol from the originator to the intended target via the graphical communications flow module so it is witnessed by all group members. This method of storing, editing, and sending feedback responses can be clearly differentiated from the Kato method. The Kato method does not allow for this type of transmission and graphical representation of iconic messages within an ongoing group, in combination with other types of communication being utilized at the same time. To illustrate this point, please see Comments Illustration 5 above.

Furthermore, because the Kato model only allows one communication tool to be used at a time within an ongoing group, the model cannot allow one group member to send an iconic message to another member to express how that member is experiencing what the speaker is saying. In Comments Illustration 6 above let's imagine the two virtual groups of five people where the voice tool is being utilized. Let's imagine Person A is talking to Person E, and Person B wants to express her reaction to what Person A is saying by sending a "happy face" to Person A. Let's say at the same time that Person D is not feeling very good about how the group is going in general and so selects a sad face to display in his box to express this information to the group. The Chemtob method allows for this interactive and simultaneous use of iconic feedback responses, while the Kato method is unable to allow the group members to use this method of communication or graphically represent such interactions. Therefore, the Chemtob method for providing a library of feedback responses is fundamentally different from the Kato method.
Claim 43 has been amended to better define the invention over the prior art.

Office Action Point 26 (Addresses Claims 11 and 37 of Chemtob application):
Claims 11 and 37 of the Chemtob application describe ***an email module*** that transmit this information to a server (Claim 11) or to an Internet website (Claim 37). This email module allows group members to access email and the Internet while continuing to participate in the ongoing interaction and activity of the virtual group via the interaction matrix and the simultaneous action window. Chemtob does not purport to have invented e-mail or the ability to surf the Internet with a group of people together. Illustration 10 shows how the Chemtob system can allow for viewing private e-mail transmitted over the internet via the personal activity box or viewing the internet web sites together via the simultaneous action window while continuing to participate in the ongoing group. No other system of virtual group interaction allows for these simultaneous activities to occur in a virtual group setting. This feature of the invention is particularly useful in the virtual office setting in which workers stay on top of their email and telephone messages even while participating in important team meetings.

Comments Illustration 10

One of Kato's Refresh Rooms Below



OR

Colyer's within team email system

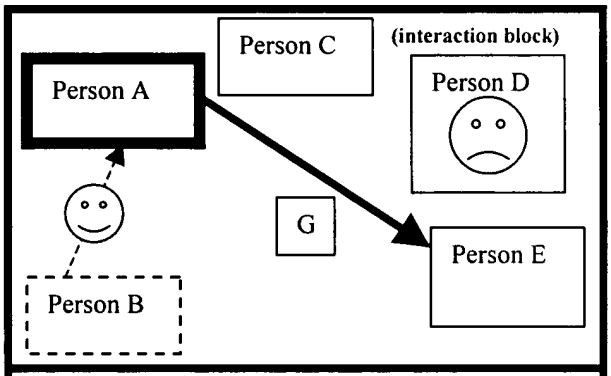
Email
Email from Mary in Marketing: Hi Doug. What are you doing?

OR

MacNaughton's group internet web surfing

Website being visited by group of people interested in viewing the website together.

Chemtob's Group Room Below



Doug's Personal Activity Box

Email from Mary in Marketing: Hi Doug. What are you doing?

Simultaneous Action Window
Internet Website being transmitted into simultaneous action window for viewing by ongoing group together

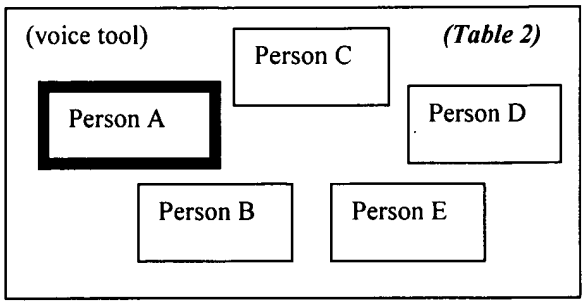
In Comments Illustration 10 above, five people are interacting together in the Chemtob group while someone is also accessing private email (and displaying it in his personal activity box) while the rest of the group is surfing the Internet via the simultaneous access window while all group members are continuing to interact via the virtual group interaction matrix. The Kato model cannot allow for these simultaneous activities, as it only allows for one meeting tool to be utilized at a time and it does not have the simultaneous action window and the personal activity box features of the Chemtob system.

The examiner points out that Colyer discloses a design for a conferencing method (column 4, lines 14-15, Colyer), and that the Colyer design allows for communicating means by email (column 10, lines 19-22, Colyer). In the Colyer model, each team member is able to launch various conferencing functions by clicking on the appropriate "button" on the toolbar (column 10, lines18-29, Colyer). There is an email button that is used to send an email to a team member (column 10, lines 21-22, Colyer). In the Colyer design, a separate window appears for transmitting email from one team member to another. This is a very similar method that is used in existing instant messaging systems. In the Chemtob design, users can write email messages and read personal email messages transmitted to their personal activity box while they continue to participate in the ongoing virtual group meeting via the interaction matrix (showing the communication flows of all interactions in the group) and viewing the presentation materials via the simultaneous action window. (See Comments Illustration 10 above.) The Chemtob system of accessing private email transmitted through the Internet while participating in an ongoing group within a virtual group meeting room is like a person viewing their Blackberry (or other PDA) while they continue to sit at a conference table talking to the other group members and viewing presentation materials on a computer monitor, a chalkboard, or an audiovisual system. The Colyer model does not allow for these simultaneous activities. Claims 11 and 37 have been amended to better define the invention over the prior art.

Office Action Point 27 (Addresses Claims 12, 16 and 38 of Chemtob application): Claims 12, 16 and 38 of the Chemtob application describe ***a shared documents capacity*** that transmits this information to a server (Claim 12), to a virtual office system (Claim 16) or to an internet website (Claim 38). The examiner points out that Colyer's design allows for an online chalkboard application (column 8, lines 25-32, Colyer). The present invention's shared documents capacity allows group members to access a shared document system while continuing to participate in the ongoing interaction and activity of the virtual group via the interaction matrix and the simultaneous action window. Chemtob does not purport to have invented document-sharing software. However, the present invention allows for the use of shared document software within the context of the virtual group meeting room. Illustration 11 shows how the Chemtob system can allow for operating a shared documents program through the simultaneous action window while continuing to participate in the ongoing group and view all group members. No other system of virtual group interaction allows for these simultaneous activities to occur in a virtual group setting. This feature of the invention is particularly useful in the virtual office setting in which workers often sit around a table in which every participant is provided with a computer on which to work while meeting together in the conference room. Comments Illustration 11 demonstrates how the Chemtob model is able to engage in the simultaneous activities of working on a shared documents program while interacting in a group meeting within a virtual conference room. It is clear from Comments Illustration 11 that neither Kato's model nor Colyer's design cannot allow for these simultaneous activities, as does the Chemtob model. Claim 12 has been amended to better define the invention over the prior art. Claim 16 has been canceled and its limitations incorporated into claim 17. Claim 38 has been amended to better define the invention over the prior art.

Comments Illustration 11

One of Kato's Refresh Rooms Below



OR

Colyer's Chalkboard System Below

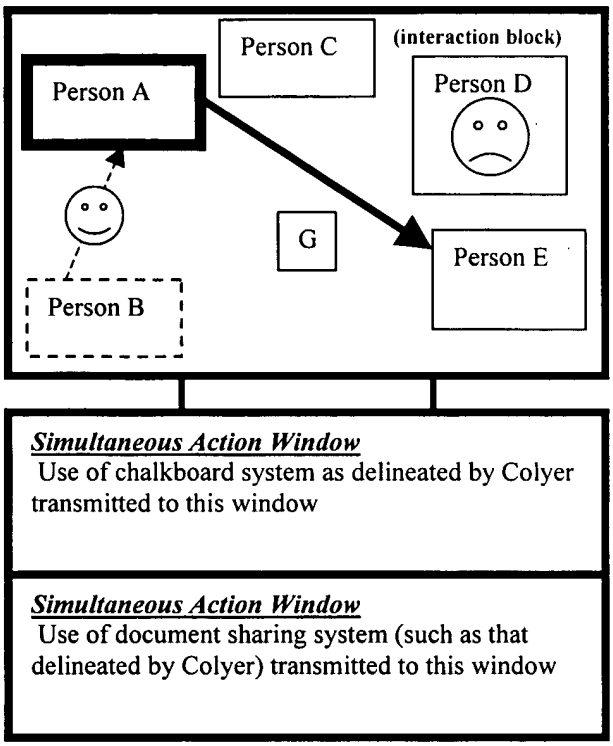
Use of chalkboard system as delineated by Colyer transmitted to this window

OR

Colyer's Document Sharing System

Use of existing document sharing system (such as that delineated by Colyer) transmitted to this

Chemtob's Group Room Below



Office Action Point 28 (Addresses Claims 13 and 39 of Chemtob application):

Claims 13 and 39 of the Chemtob application describe ***a chalkboard capacity*** that transmits this information to a server (Claim 13), or to an internet website (Claim 39). The examiner points out that Colyer's design allows for an online chalkboard application (column 8, lines 25-32, Colyer). However, the Chemtob model allows group members to access an electronic chalkboard while continuing to participate in the ongoing interaction and activity of the virtual group via the interaction matrix and the simultaneous action window. Chemtob does not purport to have invented the online computer chalkboard. However, the present invention allows for the use of a chalkboard within the context of the virtual group meeting room. Comments Illustration 11 shows how the Chemtob system can allow for using a computerized chalkboard through the simultaneous action window while all group members continue to participate in the ongoing group. No other system of virtual group interaction allows for these simultaneous activities to occur in a virtual group setting. This feature of the invention is particularly useful in the virtual office setting in which workers often sit around a table in a conference room that is equipped with a chalkboard or whiteboard. Comments Illustration 11 demonstrates how the Chemtob model is able to engage in the simultaneous activities of viewing and writing things on a large chalkboard or whiteboard while at the same time interacting in a group meeting within a virtual conference room. It is clear from Comments Illustration 11 that neither Kato's model nor Colyer's design can allow for these simultaneous

activities, as does the Chemtob model. Claims 13 and 39 have been amended to better define the invention over the prior art.

Office Action Point 29 (Addresses Claim 25 of Chemtob application): Claim 25 of the Chemtob application describes a ***method for providing a graphical ratings module*** that prompts members for a rating and graphically displays each member's response to the ratings prompt to the whole group, and provides statistical analyses of such ratings. Figure 8 of the Chemtob patent application illustrates how this feature of the virtual group activity and interaction matrix functions. Figure 8 shows six participants in a group who have been presented with the rating prompt, "Rate how helpful this group has been on a scale from 1 to 9." All group members have indicated their rating and it shows in circles with arrows directed from each participant's box to the "G" box, which stands for group as a whole. Other types of directives can be written in the ratings prompt box as well, such as, "Please write what your main goal is for being in this group." Figure 12 of the Chemtob patent application shows how all participants have responded to that question and written their main goal for the whole group to see. The examiner points out that MacNaughton discloses a design for a community browser (column 3, lines 7-8, MacNaughton), and that this design allows for members to chat and vote (equivalent to the claimed ratings module) (column 3, lines 65-67, MacNaughton). Applicant does not purport to have invented rating or voting over computer networks. However, the instant invention's method for providing a graphical ratings module that allows for prompts to make ratings and for all group participants to view everyone's ratings while they continue to interact and discuss the ratings themselves in the ongoing group is easily distinguished from the method disclosed in MacNaughton. First of all, these prompts are used as a clinical tool by the leader/therapist to facilitate group discussion. The ratings prompts are highly interactive in that they take place within the ongoing virtual group meeting. The Chemtob method allows for all ratings using the graphical ratings module to be displayed within the virtual group interaction matrix or within the simultaneous access window, where they can be discussed and processed. In addition, this information can be statistically analyzed, providing valuable information about each group member. In the MacNaughton model, there are two types of voting: **(1) Votes may be registered for or against community bookmarks, thus creating a community rating system for the bookmarks. (2) A real-time polling mechanism enables community managers to ask questions and get immediate feedback from the community members while on-line (column 4, lines 41-45, MacNaughton).** Neither of these two types of voting fulfills the same purpose as the graphical ratings module in the Chemtob method. Secondly, the ratings prompts in the Chemtob method often are focused on interpersonal variables that are relevant only in ongoing groups of the same members meeting over time. For example, a ratings prompt may direct group members to, "Rate each other group member on how helpful each member has been to you on a scale from 1 to 9." This kind of rating would make no sense in the MacNaughton context. Claim 25 has been amended to better define the invention over the prior art.

Office Action Point 30 (Addresses Claim 26 of Chemtob application): Claim 26 of the Chemtob application describes ***a diagnostic assessment module*** prompting members to answer a series of diagnostic questions and providing statistical analysis of each member's responses to the diagnostic questions. This assessment module of the Chemtob systems works very much like the Workbook described in Office Action Point 19 above. (See Comments Illustration 8 above.) In Comments Illustration 8 above, the Kato and Chemtob models are compared with respect to having an on-line workbook. In the Chemtob model, participants can continue to participate in the ongoing group interaction (via the group interaction matrix) while they are also completing some individual workbook questions (via the simultaneous access window or via the personal activity box). In the Kato model, only one meeting tool can be used at a time, so participants would have to decide whether they wanted to view the on-line workbook or engage in the voice or text interaction tool. In the Chemtob model, participants can complete on-line exercises in their workbooks (***or online diagnostic assessments***) while continuing to participate in the ongoing group discussion. In addition, a participant may have his/her workbook or assessments reviewed by the group leader while continuing to participate in the ongoing group interaction as well. The Chemtob model allows for the leader or therapist to choose the appropriate exercises and diagnostic assessments as well as the timing of their presentation so as to explain how they should be completed, exactly as would happen in a real-life group meeting. Many of the assessment questions that are asked within the context of a small ongoing group with fixed membership meeting over time are focused on interpersonal and individual variables. For example, the leader/therapist may decide to administer a Beck Depression Inventory to a particular member of a group via the diagnostic assessment module of the present invention, have that inventory scored via the statistical analysis module, and then review the report, all while simultaneously participating in the group in which that individual is also participating. Figure 16A of the Chemtob patent application demonstrates how an assessment measure (the Post-Group Questionnaire) can be administered to the entire group while the group continues to interact via the virtual group interaction matrix. This type of presentation would not be possible in either the Kato or the MacNaughton models. Figure 16C of the Chemtob patent application shows what the Leader's Post-Group Questionnaire Feedback Report looks like after statistical analysis provided by the method. The examiner points out that the MacNaughton method allows for statistical analyses of voting. However, the context, method, and purpose of such statistical analyses in the MacNaughton model are clearly distinguishable from the Chemtob method delineated here. And furthermore, neither Kato or MacNaughton have any way that they could ask diagnostic questions of group members, score these instruments, and discuss the report with the group members all during an ongoing virtual group meeting, as is possible in the present invention. Claim 26 has been amended to better define the invention over the prior art.

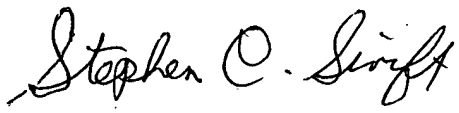
Office Action Point 31 (Addresses Claim 27 of Chemtob application): Claim 27 of the Chemtob application describes ***a method for tracking the number of messages (of all types including voice, text and iconic/feedback) sent and received by each member, along with the duration of voice messages sent by each member and voice messages received by each member, and providing statistical analysis of these communication***

data. The Chemtob model is able to accomplish this through a timer that tracks the amount of time each group member spends talking (voice communication) to each other member of the group as well as the amount of time each group member is spoken to by each other member of the group. The Chemtob model also provides a Counter Module that counts and records the number of each type of message each participant sends or receives. The counter module data is continuously recorded and sent to the statistical methods module that analyzes the communications data according to pre-programmed statistical methods, and provides reports of these analyses to the participant or leader. For example, the data may be analyzed using Round Robin Analysis of Variance which determines whether there are Actor Effects (do some people talk more than others), Partner Effects (do some people elicit more talking from others) or Relationship Effects (do some people talk more to certain people than others). Information regarding actor, partner and relationship effects provides valuable information to the group leader about group cohesion and dyadic group processes according to the Social Relations Model. The report created after statistical analysis provides valuable information to the participant, such as his or her activity levels, that can be compared with average activity levels for the group. Figure 7 of the Chemtob patent application shows a sample participant activity report (for Susan) in the simultaneous access window. Figure 16C of the Chemtob patent application shows a matrix created by statistical analysis of ratings of, "How helpful was each group member today on a scale from 1 to 7." For the purposes of this discussion, imagine that what was analyzed was how long each member talked and how long each member was spoken to; as well as how many text messages each member sent and received to each other member in the group. The Kato model has timers indicating elapsed time for how long someone has been inside one of the tables of the "Refresh Room". However, this is not an accurate measure of talk time or actor, partner and relationship effects as they relate to talking and being spoken to. Therefore, the Kato model is unable to provide the information obtained from the Chemtob method for tracking, analyzing and reporting on actor, partner and relationship effects of various communication activity variables. MacNaughton discloses a method for tracking activity levels on a community website and using statistical analyses to analyze said data (column 12, lines 5-7, MacNaughton). However, the kind of activity being tracked and analyzed (such as how many accesses have been attempted to a website and length of time consumers are connected to the community server) and the manner in which the information is utilized are fundamentally different from what is being delineated here. The MacNaughton method would not allow for a group leader to select a certain type of analysis of communications activity data, have this information analyzed via a selected statistical program, retrieve the report, and use the information to facilitate the interaction in an ongoing group, as does the Chemtob model. In addition, the MacNaughton model does not allow for the retrieval of interpersonal communication data (such as how long Person A speaks to Person B as compared with how long Person A speaks to Person C on average). Neither does the MacNaughton model allow for collecting information on actor, partner and relationship effects as the context is fundamentally different from the ongoing virtual groups meeting over time which are the focus of the present invention. Claim 27 has been amended to better define the invention over the prior art.

SUMMARY

For the foregoing reasons, applicant respectfully submits that this application is in condition to be passed to issue. If such is not the case, the Examiner is respectfully requested to call Applicant's undersigned attorney at the number given below in an effort to satisfactorily conclude the prosecution of this application.

Respectfully submitted,



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